The Case for the English Sonnet

by

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TOPICAL OUTLINE

Sixteenth Century

Nineteenth Century

Twentieth Century

INTRODUCTION

The English Sonnet has generally been considered by the majority of critics as a poetic hybrid to be tolerated in the poetical world only as a weak cousin of the "pure" Italian form. Scorned and belittled as technically and artistically inferior to the strict sonnet of Dante and Petrarch, it has had to take second place, or rather, has been forced into a secondary position by the metrical purists. The critics who so designate the English sonnet have obviously failed to weigh the full measure of significance contained in the adjective "English". Or else, in their zeal to condemn as illegitimate any form other than the Italian, they have ignored the word entirely. In that adjective lies a world of implication that is too often discounted.

The two sonnet forms are like two sides of a coin, each bearing a different impression although minted from the same metal. Certainly the English sonnet differs from the Italian. But does difference imply inferiority? By no means. In fact, the very innovations are what make the English sonnet so characteristically English. Its poetic individuality is expressed strongly in its own particular rhyme scheme, and in the stanza form peculiar to it.

Because of this last, the thought division has consequently been altered. But are the above-mentioned changes any indication that the English sonnet is any the less artistic, when skillfully executed, than the Italian? After all, the literature is full of a number of third, fourth, and fifth rate Italian sonnets.

Before proceeding further, it might be well to qualify the expression "English sonnet" as it will be used throughout the thesis. The term will refer exclusively to the three quatrain and couplet arrangement, commonly called the Shakespearean sonnet, and not to the Italian sonnet written in the English language.

This thesis aims to defend the English sonnet as a legitimate form that has been adapted to suit the material peculiarities of the English system of versification. Beyond a doubt, Surrey knew what he was about when he formulated his sonnet. He was surely familiar with the special demands imposed by the qualitative system on any form of poetry. It was the wisdom of his own genius, then, that led him to adapt what he found so pleasing in Italy to a form more suitable for use by his English brethren.

Then too, Surrey was not unaware that the English language was undergoing gradual development in his day; and he realized, therefore, that strict adherence to a foreign form might, in time, make that form distasteful to patriotic Englishmen, who even then were becoming nationalistic. Hence, he gave

England a sonnet she could call her own. For this reason, the English sonnet has always seemed to me more typically English than the Italian sonnet written in the English language.

The introduction to a discussion of the English sonnet ought to contain a clear understanding of the fundamental principles of the Italian form, for "the superstructure of English literature is based on the materials of Italian invention".[1] This statement is perhaps nowhere more applicable than in the case of the sonnet. The first chapter, therefore, will be a brief discussion of the Italian sonnet, its technical structure, and use by some of the outstanding poets.

Chapters two and three will be concerned with tracing the development of the English sonnet form, and the burden of the proof. What the thesis aims to prove to the satisfaction of the reader is, briefly stated, this: granted that the Italian sonnet justly deserves the high praise it has received through the centuries, the English sonnet has been used with as much effect and poetic artistry by the best poets since the time of Wyatt. Or, put more simply, the thesis attempts to state and prove the case for the English sonnet.

The manner of proof deemed most efficient to prove the point is the following: a comparison and contrast of an Italian

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1. Shelley, Percy Bysshe, "Defence of Poetry," in Poetry and Criticism of the Romantic Movement, edd., Oscar James Campbell, J. A. F. Pyre, Bennet Weaver, New York, F. S. Crofts, 1940, p. 514.

and English sonnet by the same author, and an Italian and English sonnet by different authors selected from the sonneteers of the 16th, 19th, and 20th, centuries. Because of the differences in language, meaning of words, and general spirit, no attempt has been made to contrast the 16th and 19th, or 16th and 20th centuries.

CHAPTER I

ITALIAN BACKGROUND

The sonnet first appeared in Italy at the beginning of the twelfth century.[2] During that century, the early Italian sonneteers, Guittone d'Arezzo, Cino da Pistoia, and Guido Cavalcante experimented with the form. These poets established the first workable rules for the versification of the sonnet.[3]

In the thirteenth century, Dante followed the form fixed by his predecessors. Based on the earlier model, his sonnets have two main divisions, commonly called the Major and the Minor. Each of these main divisions is again divided into two parts. The Major consists of eight lines, two quatrains having only two rhymes. The Minor, called the sestet, consists of six lines, two tercets which may never have more than three rhymes. Dante seems to prefer the maximum number of rhymes permissible, for of twenty sonnets (read in translation)[4] sixteen have the three-rhyme tercet. The remaining four have

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2. Hunt, James Henry Leigh, An Essay on the Sonnet, The Book of the Sonnet, vol. I, James Henry Leigh Hunt and Samuel Adams Lee, edd., Boston, Roberts Brothers, 1867, p. 8.

3. Ibid., pp. 9-10.

4. Garnett, Richard, Dante, Petrarch, Camöens, Boston, Copeland and Day, 1896, pp. 5-24.

the two-rhyme arrangement.

The rhyme scheme of the octet offered no variation from the prescribed a b b a a b b a. For the majority of Dante's sonnets, therefore, the complete rhyme scheme is a b b a a b b a c d e c d e, or as he frequently varies the sestet, c d e e d c.

Near the middle of the fourteenth century, the mantle of Dante descended on Petrarch, and for twenty years or more, he reigned as chief Italian poet. What Petrarch did for the sonnet during his career as poet was "...to free it from the crudities and metaphysics of preceeding times, which the lyrical poetry of Dante himself had not thoroughly outgrown;... to give it a music superior to Dante's;...(and) to render the sonnet...popular by its abundance."[5] Petrarch's own sonnets, written over a period of thirty-two years, number more than three hundred.[6]

Like Dante, Petrarch most frequently makes use of the three-rhyme tercet. Of fifty sonnets (read in translation),[7] no less than forty-five have the three-rhyme arrangement.

Few sonnets were produced in Italy during the fifteenth century. "Literary ambition...at that period was turned into new directions by the novels of Petrarca's friend Boccaccio,

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5. Hunt, An Essay on the Sonnet, p. 20.

6. Ibid., p. 27.

7. Garnett, Dante, Petrarch, Camöens, pp. 31-96.

by the increasing discoveries of ancient classics, by the substitution of the Greek language itself for the transferences of its authors through Arabic and Latin versions, and lastly, by the disturbed condition of Italy in Church and State, the rise of petty sovereignties, and the downfall of republics."[8] Considering the political and economic conditions mentioned above, it is easy to understand how the literary conditions would be affected so that nearly a century passed after the time of Petrarch before poets turned to the sonnet again.

Toward the end of the fifteenth century, the sonnet again came into use. But the poets who used the form were, for the most part, rank imitators of Petrarch. They copied slavishly but lacked any spark of originality.

Between the last quarter of the fifteenth century and the middle of the sixteenth century, four disciples of Petrarch rose sufficiently above the level of mere imitation of their master to be recognized as sonneteers worthy of the title. These four were Ariosto, Michael Angelo Buonarroti, Torquato Tasso, and Tommaso Campanella. Ariosto and Tasso are usually mentioned in the same breath. The passionate sonnets of the former are few; the more dignified sonnets of the latter are "thick as stars in his firmament."[9] Neither poet did anything particular to advance the sonnet beyond rendering it popular

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8. Hunt, An Essay on the Sonnet, p. 28.

9. Ibid., pp. 33-38.

by use.

The two minor poets may not be passed by without a word. Nearly all Michael Angelo's sonnets express personal feelings;[10] those of Campanella are more concerned with philosophy. However, "The sonnets of both alike are contributions to philosophical poetry in an age when the Italians had lost their ancient manliness and energy".[11]

Although weakened to a condition of degenerate Petrarchism for the most, the sonnet continued in use. Sir Sidney Lee believes that "one cause of the sonnet's persistance in Italy may possibly be found in the stimulus which all lyric poetry derived, during the last half of the sixteenth century, from the invention and wide dissemination there of music of the modern kind."[12] Leaders of the modern school were Palestrina, Vittoria, and Lassus. But it is more likely that the secular music of their contemporaries, Gabrieli and Ingegneri (whose pupil was Monteverdi), had greater influence on the lyric poetry of that period.

The relation between music and poetry was not new to the sixteenth century. In fact, the earliest sonnets were

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10. Symonds, John Addington, The Sonnets of Michael Angelo Buonarroti and Tommaso Campanella, translated, London, Smith, Elder and Co., 1878, Introduction, p. 7.

11. Symonds, J.A., The Sonnets of Michael Angelo Buonarroti and Tommaso Campanella, Introduction, p. 2.

12. An English Garner: Elizabethan Sonnets, Introduction by Sir Sidney Lee, New York, E.P. Dutton & Co., 1904, p. xxi.

always accompanied by a musical instrument of some sort. As the sonnet became more a literary fine art, it lost its musical accompaniment. But the Italian word meaning "accompanied by music", "sonare", to sound, furnished the sonnet (as well as the sonata) with a name. Nowadays the name is all that remains of the original meaning, for the traditional use of musical accompaniment was not so widely practised after the middle of the sixteenth century. Later, it was dropped altogether, so that the sonnet became a truly literary medium of artistic expression.

By the time Wyatt became acquainted with the sonnet in Italy, the form was almost never accompanied by music. It had become, rather, a vehicle for imitating Dante and Petrarch, and the imitators, with the few exceptions mentioned above, were so absorbed in the form for form's sake idea that their sonnets were hardly more than feeble echoes of Petrarch. Lacking his poetic genius, Petrarch's imitators produced literally hundreds of such weak sonnets.

So generally widespread a use of the sonnet form, however, had its advantages. Through such constant use, the form became more workable, less artificial. Although it remained the same technically, the sonnet had mellowed with age so that poets were evidencing greater facility of expression than the earlier poets. The end result, then, of the sonnet vogue that hit Italy in the sixteenth century was to make the language sound more natural, not necessarily colloquial, but

surely less stilted.

The Italian sonnet of the sixteenth century still observed the strict rules of rhyme and thought division that Petrarch had established some two centuries earlier. Technically the form, as rigid as ever, had not changed, but the language was developing all the time away from the mystical, metaphysical, medieval tongue to the lusty vernacular. Such was the condition of the Italian sonnet when Sir Thomas Wyatt became acquainted with it in the first half of the sixteenth century.

CHAPTER II

INTRODUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT IN ENGLAND

The first sonnet printed in England appeared in the 1557 edition of Tottel's Miscellany.[13] This volume contained "Songes and Sonettes, written by the ryght honorable Lorde Henry Howard late Earle of Surrey, and other".[14] One of the "and other" of the full title referred to Surrey's co-partner and pioneer of the new movement in English poetry, Sir Thomas Wyatt. The sonnet, a form which he was the first English writer to use, was Wyatt's chief instrument. Of his thirty-eight extant sonnets, the majority are direct translations from Petrarch.[15] Others show the influence of his model in thought, and to a certain degree, in form. Although Wyatt retained the strict octet of the Petrarcan sonnet, two quatrains rhyming a b b a a b b a, he concluded his sonnet with another quatrain similarly rhymed c d d c, and a couplet. By thus arranging the fourteen lines, he kept the sonnet from falling into two septets of rhyme-royal character. Such a division would have "broken"

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13. Cambridge History of English Literature, Vol. III, ed. A.W. Ward and A.R. Waller, New York, Macmillan, 1933, p. 187.

14. Ibid., pp. 188-190.

15. An English Garner: Elizabethan Sonnets with an Introduction by Sir Sidney Lee, Vol. I, New York, E.P. Dutton, Introduction, p. xxix.

the sonnet, Wyatt realized. Hence he altered the form so that both rhyme and thought came to a pause at the end of the eighth line.

With the shift in rhyme-scheme followed the inevitable and gradual shift in thought construction. The emphasis, or climax, began to fall in the third quatrain and the concluding couplet summarized upon the whole thought expressed in the preceding three quatrains. Because Wyatt observed the Petrarcan scheme in the octet, the change in thought pattern is not so clearly discernible in his sonnets. The third quatrain gathered to itself the emphasis that would normally have been placed in the first tercet of the Petrarcan sonnet. Since Wyatt emulated his Italian master both in octet form and in the use of conventional Petrarchisms, small wonder that his sonnets have a more Italianate ring than those of his fellow-poet, Surrey.

In their attempts to transfer the sonnet from its native Italian into English, both Wyatt and Surrey had to wrestle with the problem of how to reconcile the Latin quantitative system of versification and the English qualitative metrical system. Realizing that the alexandrine would lose much of its original sonority when carried over into English, and finding in practice that it was too unwieldy for English metrics, they met the problem by substituting the English iambic pentameter line.

Perhaps a word about the evolution of the iambic

pentameter line would explain more precisely just what Wyatt and Surrey had to accomplish by their substitution of this line for the original alexandrine.

Chaucer is usually credited with having introduced, late in the fourteenth century, a ten-syllable couplet from a French writer (probably Eustache Deschamp).[16] Noting that this was two syllables shorter than the usual alexandrine, and therefore much more suitable for the English language, Chaucer adapted the ten-syllable couplet, making it a five-beat line, in couplet or stanza. Thus evolved the English iambic pentameter line. But, it must be remembered that in Chaucer's time and down to the beginning of the sixteenth century, final "e's" were sounded.

In Wyatt's day, the final "e" had been dropped, but the accent had fallen on the final syllables of words, after the French manner. Thus "virtue", and "honour", for example, would be pronounced "virtù" and "honòur". Wyatt, influenced as he was by Clement Marot, followed the French practice of accenting final syllables. Thus it is that Wyatt so frequently "wrenches" the accent, giving the effect of an added syllable.

The fault is less noticeable in Surrey's poetry, for the accent was gradually moving back to the first syllable and the pronunciation of modern English was coming into use.

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16. Saintsbury, George E.B., A Manual of English Prosody, Reprint of First Edition, London, Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1919, p. 334.

As a result of the changes in the developing language, poetry became more flexible. From this point on, the iambic pentameter line acquired a certain sublimity. "For reasons which have to do with pure poetics", says Mr. Crosland, "it happens that practically all great English poetry has been written in decasyllabic lines".[17]

Considering that the English language was undergoing the gradual transition into more modern English, the final solution arrived at by Wyatt and Surrey was an admirable one indeed. Wyatt's attempts, full of awkward expressions and wrenched accents though they be, should not be scorned. His efforts laid the corner stone on which later poets built the edifice of the English sonnet.

Far more competent than Wyatt, and infinitely more gifted with poetic sense, Surrey tuned his lyre to the sweetness of tone he had learned to love in Italy. But when he plucked the strings, his lyre gave forth melodies in a decidedly English strain.

Adopting the least common of the permissible variations of the regular Petrarchian form, Surrey closed his sonnets with a rhyming couplet. With the growing domination of the couplet, the preceeding lines lost the former demarcations and limitations of quatrains and tercets. Once broken down in this way, the strict form developed into a succession of alternately

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17. Crosland, T.W.H., The English Sonnet, Dodd, Mead and Co., New York, 1918, p. 19.

rhymed lines closed with a couplet. The alternate rhyme increased the five rhymes of the Italian sonnet to the seven rhymes of Surrey's sonnet. Briefly sketched, this is the evolution of what has come to be called the English sonnet.

No amount of debate, however, can argue the case for the English sonnet so convincingly as a comparison of two sonnets from this "evolutionary" stage of development. One by Wyatt and one by Surrey, both are translations of the <u>same</u> sonnet of Petrarch. The striking difference between the two is evident on first reading.

> "The longe love, that in my thought I harber
> And in my heart doth keep his residence,
> Into my face preaseth with bold pretence,
> And therein campeth, spreding his banner.
> She that me learneth to love and to suffer,
> And willes that my trust and negligence
> Be reined by reason, shame and reverence,
> With his hardinesse taketh his displeasure.
> Where with all unto the heart's forest he fleeth,
> Leaving his enterprise with paine and crye,
> And there him nideth and not appeareth,
> What may I do when my master feareth,
> But in the field with him to live and die?
> For good is the life, ending faithfully."[18]

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18. Wyatt's version:
Crosland, T.W.H., <u>The English Sonnet</u>, p. 127.

The following is Surrey's version of the same sonnet:

"Love that liveth and reigneth in my thought,
That built his seat within my captive breast
Clad in the arms wherein with me he fought
Oft in my face he doth his banner rest.
She, that taught me to love and suffer pain;
My doubtful hope and eke my hot desire
With shamefast cloak to shadow and refrain,
Her smiling grace converteth straight to ire.
And coward love then to the heart apace
Taketh her flight; whereas he lurks and plains
His purpose lost, and dare not show his face.
For my Lord's guilt thus faultless bide I pains.
Yet from my Lord shall not my foot remove;
Sweet is his death, that takes his end by love."[19]

Between Wyatt and Surrey and the Big Four of the English Sonnet are a number of minor poets whose very position as lesser lights makes them important, for these lesser poets paved the way for the greater ones. This is found to be true especially in the matter of form, for as one critic points out, "the Elizabethan giants had no imitators; being imitators themselves and superb improvers on the small men".[20] Yet it was to the credit of these small men that they turned over the soil and planted the seed which the later men cultivated and harvested. Chief among this noteworthy group are Daniel, Lodge, Giles Fletcher, William Percy, William Smith, and Henry Constable.

Daniel, undoubtedly the greatest of the lot, brought out his "Delia" in 1591. Of the fifty-four sonnets of the

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19. Surrey's version:
Seccombe, Th., ed., An English Garner: Elizabethan Sonnets, Vol. I, Introduction, p. xxxvi.

20. Crosland, T.W.H., The English Sonnet, p. 139.

sequence proper and the seven so-called "rejected sonnets" which were added to the main text in a later edition, all except two (no. 35 of Delia and no. 2 of rejected sonnets) are in the pure English form. Generally the rhyme scheme for these sonnets is either a b a b b c b c c d c d e e, or a b a b b c b c d e d e f f. "Daniel's lines are smooth and melodious", says a critic, "and he was perhaps as great a master of the technique of rhyme as was Shakespeare himself."[21]

The "Phillis" of Thomas Lodge and the "Licia" of Giles Fletcher both appeared in 1593. These two sequences are fairly typical of Elizabethan poetry in the use of conventional conceits, although neither contains anything especially noteworthy. Of the two, Fletcher's work shows in general a command of the sonnet form which few of his contemporaries excelled.

The following year William Percy published his "Sonnets to the Fairest Coelia", a conventional sequence of twenty sonnets all in the English form. Although he observed the pause at the octet, the total effect of the sonnet is often marred by his addiction to double rhyme, doubly bad when used in the couplet, as in the following:

> "Since unkind fates permit me not t'enjoy her,
> No more (burst eyes!) I mean for to annoy her."[22]

Of this group of minor poets, second only to Daniel is Henry Constable whose "Diana", a sequence of twenty three

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21. Crow, Martha Foote, ed., Elizabethan Sonnet Cycles, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., 1896, p. 10.

22. Crosland, T.W.H., The English Sonnet, p. 132.

sonnets, appeared in 1594. Although not an especially great poet, Constable helped to establish the true form of the English Sonnet. In eight cases out of ten he uses the Shakespearean scheme, but without the octet pause. The following is an excellent example of Constable at his best:

"To live in hell, and heaven to behold,
To welcome life, and die a living death,
To sweat with heat, and yet be freezing cold,
To grasp at stars, and lie the earth beneath,
To tread a maze that never shall have end,
To burn in sighs, and starve in daily tears,
To climb a hill, and never to descend,
Giants to kill, and quake at childish fears,
To pine for food, and watch th' Hesperian tree,
To thirst for drink, and nectar still to draw,
To live accurst whom men hold blest to be,
And weep those wrongs, which never creature saw;
If this be love, if love in these be founded,
My heart is love, for these in it are grounded."[23]

Last of the minor sonneteers of note is William Smith whose "Chloris", a sequence of fifty-nine sonnets, was published in 1596. All of these but one follow the English model.

Other names appear in the ranks and may be mentioned here in the position of "also-rans". Barnaby Barnes' "Divine Century of Spiritual Sonnets" was published in 1595. Although these sonnets are Italian in nature and spirit, all but two have the couplet ending.

In the same year came Richard Barnefield's "Cynthia". "Diella" by R.L. appeared in 1596, as did "Fidessa" of R. Griffen. Later came the "Aurora" of William Alexander, Earl of Stirling, and the "Sonnets" of Joshua Sylvester.

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23. Ibid., p. 131.

These last men may be dealt with summarily, but not so the four great sonneteers of the age, Sidney, Spenser, Drayton, and Shakespeare. They must be discussed more fully.

Sidney more than the other three shows in the thought and form of his sonnets the influence of his foreign masters, Petrarch and Ronsard. Although he made small resistance to the couplet ending introduced by Wyatt and Surrey, he avoided it in twenty-one of the Astrophel and Stella sonnets by changing the preceding four lines so as to keep the effect of the double tercet. Thus for all but two of the one hundred and ten sonnets of this sequence, the rhyme scheme is for the octet a b b a a b b a invariably; but for the sestet the rhyme is either c d c d e e, or c c d e e d.

The last two sonnets of the "Astrophel and Stella" are in the pure English form. These two will be treated later.

"Perhaps of all the so-called sequences, Sidney's "Astrophel and Stella" is the most delicate and sincerely human."[24] The reader comes to feel that Stella is a real flesh and blood person, not merely a conventional Elizabethan conceit.

"Spenser no less than Sidney to a large extent handled the sonnet as a poetic instrument whereon to repeat in his mother tongue what he found pleasing in Italy and France",[25]

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24. Crosland, T.W.H., The English Sonnet, p. 143.

25. An English Garner of Elizabethan Sonnets, New York, E.P Dutton and Co., 1904, Introduction by Sir Sidney Lee, Introduction, p.

comments Sir Sidney Lee. Ariosto, Du Bellay, and Marot were Spenser's particular models. From them, he inherited much of the "sweetness" found in his lines.

Another source of this same sweetness is to be found in the particular rhyme scheme Spenser used in his sonnets. The first eight lines rhyming a b a b b c b c Spenser obviously incorporated into his sonnet form from his Fairie Queen stanza. The sound is melodious to be sure; but in spite of the musical effect, the "b" in the second quatrain is confusing to the ear for two reasons: the ear misses a fourth rhyme, and hears an unexpected couplet between the quatrains which is not altogether pleasing.

Constructed on this interlocking rhyme, then, the scheme for the whole of Spenser's sonnet is
a b a b b c b c c d c d e e. The eighty-eight sonnets which make up the "Amoretti" are all in the five-rhyme form which Spenser used to the exclusion of all others. Ironically enough he hit upon the Shakespearean rhyme in the course of his poetic experimentation, but discarded it in favour of his own innovation. "It is said to Spenser's credit," however, "that he did not confound the Petrarcan and English forms to the extent of affixing an English sestet to a Petrarcan octet; that he observed the proper break or pause between the octet and sestet; that he opened the sestet with the proper turn, and that having elaborated a form of his own he adhered to it inflexibly as did Sidney before him and Shakespeare after

him."[26]

The sonnets of Sidney and Spenser are clear proof that "the Elizabethan sonnet offers the best of all illustrations of the vast debt that Elizabethan literature owes to foreign influences."[27] With Drayton, however, the English sonnet for the first time assumes its own characteristics and stands four-square on its own foundations. Foreign models are almost completely discarded and the English sonnet becomes truly English. As Drayton himself put it in the introductory sonnet to his "Idea",

> "My verse is the true image of my mind,
> Ever in motion, still desiring change;
> And as thus to variety inclined,
> So in all humours sportively I range!
> My Muse is rightly of the English strain,
> That cannot long one fashion entertain."

Written in 1594, but not published until 1619, Drayton's sequence "The Idea" proves beyond a doubt that his genius was "rightly of the English strain". Fifty-two of the sixty-three sonnets are in the strict English form; the remaining eleven are either variations of the English form, or samples of the metrical buffoonery in which Drayton liked to indulge at times. With very few exceptions, the rhyme scheme for Drayton's sonnets is a b a b c d c d e f e f g g.

Although Drayton writes almost wholly of love, his sonnets, unlike the "sugar'd sweetness" of Sidney and Spenser, have a rugged, forthright quality about them. This forth-

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26. Crosland, T.W.H. The English Sonnet, p. 181.
27. An English Garner: Elizabethan Sonnets, Introd. p. xii.

rightness is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the onsets, and the most notable example is the famous "Love-Parting":

> "Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part:
> Nay, I have done; you get no more of me."

No onset in Shakespeare could possibly compare with that for sheer emotional content. One critic has remarked that "Shakespeare begins like an emperor; Drayton like a man with a heart in his bosom."[28] And in no one of his sonnets has Shakespeare more tenderness of regret than:-

> "Shake hands for ever; cancel all our vows
> And when we meet at any time again
> Be it not seen in either of our brows
> That we one jot of former love retain."

Certain critics have suggested that Drayton was a clumsy, stolid sort of poet with little artistic deftness, one who had to "beat out" his lines. For a sonnet that depends for its success on absolute polish and finish, clever management, nimble diction, and consummate artistry, let the following contradict these critics:

> "As Love and I, late harboured in one inn,
> With proverbs thus each other entertain,
> "In love there is not lack", thus I begin;
> "Fair words make fools", replieth he again;
> "That spares to speak, doth spare to speed", quoth I.
> "As well", saith he, "too forward as too slow."
> "fortune assists the boldest", I reply;
> "A hasty man", quoth he, "ne'er wanted woe."
> "Labour is light, where love", quoth I, doth pay;"
> Saith he, "light burthen's heavy, if far borne";
> Quoth I, "the main lost, cast the by away":
> You have spun a fair thread, he replies in scorn.
> And having thus awhile each other thwarted,
> Fools as we met, so fools again we parted."

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28. Crosland, T.W.H., The English Sonnet, p. 159.

Drayton's position among the earlier Elizabethan sonneteers is very nearly supreme; his state is indeed kingly. Although his sonnets are seldom concerned with the deep matters that Shakespeare's are, and although in general they lack the sweetness and majesty of the greater poet, nevertheless certain of Drayton's sonnets are even greater than Shakespeare's. Some such would be the "Love-Parting", of course, the "Phoenix" sonnet, the sonnet on "Secricie", and "My thoughts bred up with Eagle-birds of Jove". Each of these sonnets is a triumph in its way, and each offers clear proof that Drayton justly deserves the epithet of "golden-mouthed".

In the history of English literature, Drayton would probably have been remembered as Shakespeare's equal in this particular form, had Shakespeare not possessed the "something more than art" that made him master of the English sonnet for all time. The "something more", amounting ultimately to genius, is precisely what makes Shakespeare's sonnets so memorable. Throughout the set of one hundred and fifty-four sonnets, his genius is evident in the unique turning of a phrase, the inimitable metaphors, and the successful combination of stateliness and sweetness resulting in a tone of exaltation. Two notable examples of this successful combination are the sonnets beginning, "When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes" and "When to the sessions of sweet silent thought". A third illustration of this peculiar quality in Shakespeare's sonnets is number twelve of the set, which has as its opening line the

following perfect use of onomatopoeia, "When I do count the clock that tells the time."

For each of the one hundred and fifty-four sonnets of set, Shakespeare used the same technical framework, three quatrains and a concluding couplet, with the rhyme scheme always a b a b c d c d e f e f g g.

"The Shakespearean sonnet", comments Mr. D.C. Meredith, "was designed to express the sweetness which alternately rhymed pentameter makes possible. ... Its continual change of rhymes gives a rich verbal freshness created by these changes. Yet the change of rhyme sounds in each division helps mark apart its several segments."[29]

Since the quatrain is the unit of thought in the English sonnet, each of the three quatrains presents a separate treatment of the theme. The effectiveness and artistry of thought development is increased by the use of a different pair of rhymes for each quatrain. The alternate rhymes help as much to create the emotional climax as the actual words themselves; for the ear is quick to sense the shift in mood inevitably expressed by the particular rhyme employed, and to note as quickly the concluding effect produced by the identical rhyme of the couplet.

Shakespeare was too much a poet not to know full well the value of euphony. In the course of the sonnets, he uses

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29. Meredith, Duke Cole, The Sonnet, Atlanta, Banner Press, 1939, p. 33.

every device of poetic technique to enhance the charm of his work. It is interesting to note, however, that only in a relatively small proportion of the sonnets does Shakespeare fall back on the outright simile.[30] His more usual method is to clothe his thoughts in the subtle metaphor.

So skillfully did Shakespeare handle the English sonnet that the technical construction of the whole form presented a well balanced, harmonious unit. No one quatrain dominated, but each was the logical poetic development of the preceding and the final couplet, containing a reflection, comment, or summary of the main theme expressed in the quatrains, blended with the mood of the sonnet as a whole.

In the final couplet of each of his one hundred and fifty-four sonnets, Shakespeare avoided the epigrammatic twist to the final couplet by having the thought contained therein closely connected with the idea of the whole sonnet, and more immediately with the final clause of the third quatrain. In this way, the thought of the couplet is conjoined with the thought in the preceding lines, not disjoined. There is much to be said for the artistic finish of this couplet-rhymed summarization of the theme.[31]

During the fifty years or so from Surrey to Shakespeare, the English sonnet developed, as has been briefly shown, the

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30. Numbers 9, 29, 52, 60, 61, 68, 75, 78, 80, 85, 93, 95, 96, 97, 108, 109, 111, 118, 130, 131, 143, 147.

31. Meredith, D.C., The Sonnet, pp. 36-37.

particular characteristics, nationalistic as well as poetic, that justify its consideration as a praiseworthy form of lyric expression. The alternate rhyme, development of thought in quatrains, and the concluding rhymed couplet are the makings of the English sonnet. Yet these characteristics constitute the very grounds on which the metrical purist bases his condemnation of the English sonnet as a poetic half-breed.

From Shakespeare's time to the present day, the English sonnet has been used by first-rate poets, and used, as I shall try to show, as effectively as the Italian form. In many instances, from Sidney to Miss Millay, a poet has chosen to write in both sonnet forms. When this is the case, the English form has proved to be as skillfully executed and as great an expression of the poet's genius as his Italian sonnets. Just such an example may be found in the sonnets of Drummond of Hawthorneden.

In point of time, Drummond is often called the next-best sonnet-writer to Shakespeare. His sonnets, for the most part, are Italian in form and thought, showing how strongly he was influenced by Petrarch. His sonnets abound in conventional Petrarchisms. Occasionally, however, Drummond broke loose from the Petrarcan restrictions long enough to give expression to a poetic thought in the English sonnet form. When he does, the effect is not unlike a sonnet of Shakespeare's. Drummond's Italianate sonnets have all the typical Petrarcan sweetness, and his English sonnets have the characteristic

strength peculiar to that form. More clearly than further discussion, the point can be made by comparing the two sonnets that follow. Both by Drummond, they illustrate his particular poetic charm and are sufficient evidence that he was as adept with the English sonnet as he was with the Italian.

The first, from Drummond's collection of sacred sonnets titled "Flowres of Sion" (ed. 1630), is Drummond at his best in the Italian sonnet:[32]

"Beneath a sable vaile, and Shadows deepe,
Of unaccessible and dimming light,
In Silence ebane Clouds more black than Night,
The Worlds great King his secrets hidde doth keepe:
Through those Thicke Mistes when any Mortall Wight
Aspires, with halting pace and eyes that weepe,
To pore, and in his Misteries to creepe,
With Thunders hee and Lightnings blastes their Sight.
O Sunne invisible, thou dost abide
Within thy bright abysmes, most faire, most darke,
Where with thy proper Rayes thou dost thee hide;
O ever-shining, never full-seen marke,
To guide mee in Lifes Night, thy light mee show:
The more I search of thee, the lesse I know."

Added to the 1630 edition of "Flowres of Sion" is the following sonnet addressed to Drummond's friend, Sir William Alexander:[33]

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32. Main, David, A Treasury of English Sonnets, compiled by D. Main, New York, Hurst and Company, 1881, p. 328.

33. Ibid., p. 332.

"Though I have twice beene at the Doores of Death,
And twice found shoote those Gates, which ever mourne,
This but a lightning is, Truce tane to Breath;
For late borne Sorrowes augure fleete returne.
Amidst thy sacred Cares and courtlie Toyles,
Alexis, when thou shalt heare wandring Fame
Tell Death hath triumphed o're my mortall Spoyles,
And that on Earth I am but a sad Name;
If thou e'er helde me deare, by all our Love,
By all that Blisse, those joyes Heaven heere us gave,
I conjure Thee, and by the Maides of Jove,
To grave this short Rememberance on my Grave:
Heere Damon lyes, whose Songes did some-time grace
The murmuring Eske; may Roses shade the place."

This particular sonnet, important for its autobiographical significance, clearly shows what Drummond could do with the English form. It has all the noble simplicity of one of Shakespeare's sonnets. Had Drummond used this form more often, he might have been remembered not as second to Shakespeare, but as his equal. The first two lines,

"Though I have twice beene at the Doores of Death,
And twice found shoote those Gates, which ever mourne,"

are full of poignant pathos and remind the reader of the onset of Shakespeare's sixty-sixth sonnet:

"Tired with all these, for restful death I cry..."

Not so harsh as Shakespeare's outburst, Drummond's quiet statement is made with all the poetic feeling imaginable. Drummond proved himself a master of the technical tricks of poetry. Within the small space of this one sonnet, he has used alliteration, has used vowel sounds to suggest a mournful atmosphere, and has even used a pun worthy of Shakespeare, in,

"To grave this short rememberance on my Grave..."

Drummond, then, because he wrote mostly in the Italian form

will be remembered as an English sonnet-writer, not as a writer of English sonnets.

Another poet whose work falls in the first quarter of the seventeenth century, but who is seldom thought of in connection with the sonnet, is George Herbert, leader of the Metaphysicals. His fame generally rests on "The Temple". A few of this collection of "Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations" are sonnets worthy of the title. Indeed so noteworthy that Coleridge says of one of them in the Biographia Literaria , that it is a sonnet "equally admirable for the weight, number, and expression of the thoughts, and for the simple dignity of the language...". The sonnet Coleridge had in mind was the following:[34]

> "Immortal Love, author of this great frame,
> Sprung from that beauty which can never fade,
> How hath man parceled out Thy glorious name
> And thrown on it that dust which thou has made,
> Which mortal love doth all the title gain!
> Which siding with invention, they together
> Bear all the sway, possessing heart and brain,
> Thy workmanship, and give Thee share in neither.
> Wit fancies beauty, beauty raiseth wit.
> The world is theirs; they two play out the game,
> Thou standing by. And though Thy glorious name
> Wrought our deliverance from the infernal pit,
> Who sings Thy praise? Only a scarf or glove
> Doth warm our hands and make them write of love."

This one, like all of Herbert's sonnets, follows the English scheme. It is emminently characteristic of Herbert's poetic quaintness, and the feature that Coleridge stresses above

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34. Coleridge, S.T., Biographia Literaria, (2nd ed. 1847, ii, 102), Main, David, comp., A Treasury of English Sonnets, p. 337.

others in the purity of diction found in the sonnet. Yet these very elements in Herbert's poetry are what have blinded many readers to the true worth of his poetry. Surely the above sonnet is sufficient proof that Herbert's sonnets, though few, merit a place in the ranks of sonnet literature.

Aside from Milton's twenty-three sonnets, all of which are written on the Italian scheme, the century from 1650 to 1750 (roughly speaking) was comparatively lacking in sonnets. Such as managed to find their way into the public eye were either so badly mangled poetically that no one bothered to read them, or else they were by too obscure poets. In general, the literary taste of that particular period was turned to an appreciation of satire romping along in "rocking-horse" meter. Such an attitude on the part of authors and readers alike does not make for the receptivity necessary for an appreciation of the sonnet. That form, consequently, was laid "on the shelf".

After 1750, tastes, attitudes, and the new spirit of what was later to be romanticism changed the atmosphere so that it became more congenial to the sonnet. Slowly the form begins to appear again, like a shy thing coaxed out of hiding.

Most of the sonnets for the next fifty years follow the Italian model. Thomas Gray's one sonnet, although unorthodox, tends toward the Italian form. All of Thomas Warton's sonnets are Italian, as are those of William Cowper, William Lisle Bowles, and Thomas Russell.

The lone exception seems to be the obscure sonnets of

Charlotte Smith. Hers, written on the English model, were first published in 1784 under the title of "Elegiac Sonnets and Other Essays".

With the turn of the century came a revival of interest in the English sonnet.[35] Among the bright lights of the first half of the century, probably John Keats used the form most successfully. His seventeen sonnets proper are all on the Italian model. But of his thirty-six posthumous sonnets, seventeen are in the English form.[36] Among this group are such well known ones as, "When I have fears that I may cease to be," and, "Bright Star, were I as steadfast as thou art."

Several other minor poets ought to come in for mention at least, not because they were the best poets of the age necessarily, but because they used the English sonnet with notable success. The list would include John Sterling, Charles Tennyson Turner, Julian Fane, Arthur Henry Hallam, William Caldwell Roscoe, and David Gray. These poets[37] enjoyed moderate success in their own day, but are seldom read today chiefly because their poetry is "dated". A thoughtful reading

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35. Since Wordsworth's sonnets are so varied in form as to be neither strict Italian sonnets, or a close approximation of the English form, mention of his works has been omitted in this discussion.

36. Forman, H. Buxton, ed., The Complete Poetical Works of John Keats, New York, Thomas Y. Crowell, 1895, pp. 357-450.

37. Samples of their work may be found in A Treasury of English Sonnets, compiled by David M. Main, pp. 182-234.

of their works, however, reveals much that is quite worthwhile.

During the period from 1880 to 1900 and shortly after, two Englishmen achieved success with the English sonnet. Although Thomas Hardy has only four in print now, the others having been destroyed, those four are sufficient evidence that Hardy might have been a successful sonneteer had he not turned to novel writing. The four, entitled "She to Him", were written during Hardy's middle twenties, but were not published until some thirty years later, according to Mrs. Hardy's volume The Early Life of Thomas Hardy.[38]

The rhyme scheme of three of the "She to Him" set is worth noting. It consists of the unusual number of six rhymes and is arranged a b a b c d c d e f e f f e.

The fifty-eight sonnets of Wilfrid Scawen Blunt's sequence entitled "Esther" are more regular than Hardy's. All follow the conventional seven rhyme arrangement of the Shakespearean model. Blunt shares with Hardy a success in execution of the English sonnet form.

Although Blunt wrote all sorts of poetry, "his best achievements", Mr. Peterson believes, "were in the sonnet form, which he employed some three hundred times, mostly in the elaboration of five sequences, The Love Sonnets of Proteus, Natalia's Resurrection, In Vinculis, A New Pilgrimage, and Esther. In 1898 W. E. Henley held the opinion that Proteus

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38. Peterson, Houston, ed., The Book of Sonnet Sequences, reprint of 1st edition, New York, Longmans, Green and Co., 1930, p. 231.

was 'the truest and sincerest revelation done in these times of the emotions peculiar to men's youth' and would ultimately be ranked with Sidney and Shakespeare. The Proteus series contains a dozen or more fine individual sonnets...(which), although not structurally perfect, have perhaps, as William Sharp said, 'more of the Shakespearean ring' than any sonnets of our age."[39]

One characteristically Shakespearean element in Blunt's sonnets is the full stop at the end of the third quatrain. In the Esther sequence of fifty-eight sonnets, twenty-seven have either a period or a question mark to make a distinct pause between the last quatrain and the concluding couplet. But as in Shakespeare's sonnets, so in Blunt's the couplet is not sharply divorced from the quatrains by the full stop. The sense is closely related to the preceding thought so that the couplet blends into the pattern of the whole sonnet.

Something new in sonnet patterns is found in the "Last Sonnets" of Alan Seeger, written shortly before his death in 1916. Of the fourteen sonnets in this set, only three[40] are regular English sonnets, rhymed on the Shakespearean scheme. The other eleven follow a curious rhyme scheme that introduces an eighth rhyme, conveniently called "h". This "h" rhyme is used in two successive lines and the resulting couplet-effect

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39. Peterson, The Book of Sonnet Sequences, p. 302.

40. Ibid., pp. 391-397 (nos. 1, 7, 8).

before the end of the sonnet sounds a bit strange. But Seeger has used his extra rhyme so smoothly that the sonnet as a whole does not suffer because of the innovation. One of the best, employing the rhyme scheme a b a b c d c d e f g H H g, is the following, number eleven of the "Last Sonnets":

> "Deep in the sloping forest that surrounds
> The head of a green valley that I know,
> Spread the fair gardens and ancestral grounds
> Of Bellinglise, the beautiful chateau.
> Through shady groves and fields of unmown grass,
> It was my joy to come at dusk and see,
> Filling a little pond's untroubled glass,
> Its antigue towers and mouldering masonry.
> Oh, should I fall tomorrow, lay me here,
> That o'er my tomb, with each reviving year,
> Wood-flowers may blossom and the wood-doves croon;
> And lovers by that unrecorded place,
> Passing, may pause, and cling a little space,
> Close bossomed, at the rising of the moon."[41]

This particular sonnet has about it a quiet dignity and a classic simplicity doubly pathetic when the reader remembers that not long after Seeger was laid to rest, but not near "the beautiful chateau".

The same simplicity and straightforward expression is found in Seeger's more regular English sonnets. Almost Elizabethan in tone is the following sonnet, number eight of the "Last Sonnets":

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41. Peterson, The Book of Sonnet Sequences, p. 396.

"Oh, love of woman, you are known to be
A passion sent to plague the hearts of men;
For every one you bring felicity
Bringing rebuffs and wretchedness to ten.
I have been oft where human life sold cheap
And seen men's brains spilled out about their ears
And yet that never cost me any sleep;
I live untroubled and I shed no tears.
Fools prate how war is an atrocious thing;
I always knew that nothing it implied
Equalled the agony of suffering
Of him who loves and loves unsatisfied.
War is a refuge to a heart like this;
Love only tells it what true torture is."[42]

For forthright expression comparable to Drayton's, note the line "I live untroubled and I shed no tears." And the couplet is surely as powerful as the best couplets of the Master Elizabethan sonneteers.

Turning from England to America, we find that the revolt in poetry of the 1890's, carrying over into the new century, did not include a rejection of the English sonnet as a poetic form. In view of the experimental attitude of the Imagists and the Expressionists, such a rejection might have been expected. But the English sonnet continued to be written even while the controversies raged among the new "schools".

Three poets of the early twentieth century clung to tradition in the face of the reactionary movement in poetry, clung to tradition to the extent of using the English sonnet form, whatever innovations they may have attempted. These three are Richard Hovey, Arthur Davison Ficke, and, strange as it may seem, Ezra Pound.

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42. Peterson, The Book of Sonnet Sequences, p. 394.

Probably a greater poet than any of the aforementioned three is George Santayana. Nearly all his sonnets, like the set of twenty written between 1883-1893,[43] are in the Italian form. There is, however, an occasional exception. For the sake of contrast, let the following two sonnets indicate that Santayana was as versatile a poet in the English form as he was in the Italian:

"Our youth is like a rustic at the play
That cries aloud in simple-hearted fear,
Curses the villain, shudders at the fray,
And weeps before the maiden's wreathed bier.
Yet once familiar with the changeful show,
He starts no longer at the brandished knife,
But, his heart chastened at the sight of woe,
Ponders the mirrored sorrows of his life.
So tutored too, I watch the moving art
Of all this magic and impassioned pain
That tells the story of the human heart
In a false instance, such as poets feign;
I smile, and keep within the parchment furled
That prompts the passions of this strutting world."[44]

And his more customary Italianate sonnet:

"O world, thou choosest not the better part!
It is not wisdom to be only wise,
And on the inward vision close the eyes,
But it is wisdom to believe the heart.
Columbus found a world, and had no chart
Save one that faith deciphered in the skies;
To trust the soul's invincible surmise
Was all his science and his only art.
Our knowledge is a torch of smoky pine
That lights the pathway but one step ahead
Across a void of mystery and dread.
Bid, then, the tender light of faith to shine
By which alone the mortal heart is led
Unto the thinking of the thought sublime."[45]

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43. Ibid., pp. 335-344.

44. Untermeyer, Louis, ed., Modern American Poetry, Fifth Revised Edition, New York, Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1936, p. 126.

45. Ibid., p. 126.

Each of these two sonnets expresses a time-honoured thought, and in each case, the thought derives, from the characteristic poetic elements of the sonnet form in which it framed, a fresh turn of expression. The lines from the English sonnet,

> "...his heart chastened at the sight of woe,
> Ponders the mirrored sorrows of his life."

and,

> "I smile, and keep within the parchment furled
> That prompts the passions of this strutting world."

have a truly Shakespearean ring, due in part (I believe) to Santayana's choice of such words as "chastened", "mirrored sorrows", and "strutting world". This English sonnet would have delighted Shakespeare himself.

The English sonnet appealed to four more recent poets, who may still be too close to our own day for critical judgment. Winifred Welles and James Agee are probably less well known than Robert Nathan and Robert Hillyer.

Speaking of Robert Nathan, Louis Untermeyer says, "More original sonnets have been written by poets of his generation; but, unconcerned with originality, Nathan restates traditional themes and, by the sincerity of his utterance, accomplishes that delightful miracle which lifts platitude into poetry."[46] Criticizing Nathan's work more generally, the same author remarks, "Nathan is not a modernist; there are no experiments or departures here. There is, on the other hand, a little sadness, a little shrugging whimsicality, and not a little

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46. Untermeyer, Modern American Poetry, p. 522.

wisdom."[47]

Since Nathan is not a modernist, it is not surprising to find that he uses with skill so traditional a form as the English sonnet. "When in the crowd I suddenly behold", is quoted here to show that Nathan has achieved in his sonnet that certain grace of expression commonly found among the Elizabethan sonneteers:

> "When in the crowd I suddenly behold
> Your small, proud head, so like a queen for grace,
> Bearing its weight of spun and twisted gold
> Like an old crown on an imperial face;
> When through the chime of gossip and the cries,
> I meet your glance, amused, serene, and bright
> With some small secret, and behold your eyes
> Leap into laughter and immediate light,
> Then as a bird might hear repeated over
> (His own song done) the same familiar part
> From the distant boughs and from the absent lover,
> And with that single beauty fill his heart,
> I hear all other sounds, all other words,
> Dwindle to silence like the sound of birds."[48]

Constructed on the conventional "when-then" formula commonly used by Shakespeare, this sonnet of Nathan's has much of the "feel" of those constructed on the same pattern among the Bard's one hundred and fifty-four.

Another modern sonnet admirably Shakespearean in tone is the one by Robert Hillyer entitled, "As One Who Bears Beneath His Neighbor's Roof".[48] Skillfully wrought so that not a word is out of place, this sonnet is reminiscent of those by Drayton that are characterized by "nimble diction".

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47. Untermeyer, Modern American Poetry, p. 523.

48. Ibid., p. 546.

Successful as were Nathan and Hillyer with the English sonnet form, they are surpassed by the three who might be called the Big Three, so far as the English Sonnet in modern times is concerned. These three are Conrad Aiken, Robinson Jeffers, and Edna St. Vincent Millay, whose works will be discussed at length in the following chapter.

CHAPTER III

COMPARISON AND CONTRAST

One of the chief defenders of the English sonnet wrote, "This particular form of sonnet is justified ten thousand times over by its works."[49] Although justification by works is a strong argument indeed for the validity of the form, the case for the English sonnet must also be founded on a consideration of the consummate poetic skill required, for the artistic execution of the whole depends on a mastery of the component parts, the quatrain and the couplet.

Since the quatrain is the unit of thought development in the English sonnet, it becomes necessarily the backbone of the entire sonnet structure. Long recognized as a stanza for special occasions, the quatrain is governed by laws as imperative as those of the sonnet.[50] The foremost law requires the thought or idea to be expressed fully within the four lines. To this end of compact poetic expression, the quatrain may contain no superfluous word, no meaningless phrase, for such introductions would detract from the desired effect of condensation. Yet the very limits imposed by the quatrain are what

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49. Saintsbury, George E.B., History of English Prosody, Vol. I, Bk. IV, p. 307.

50. Matthews, James Brander, A Study of Versification, New York Houghton, Mifflin, 1911, p. 128.

make it a difficult stanza, requiring skill of the poet who would use it with success. A perfect quatrain is as rare as a perfect sonnet.[51] And the poet who would be master of the English sonnet must first have command of the quatrain.

As compensation for the limit of so small a space, the quatrain offers the poet the freedom of three possible rhyme-schemes: a a b b; a b b a; a b a b. Of the three, the last became the basic rhyme-pattern for the quatrains of the English sonnet. Alternately rhymed lines of iambic pentameter with a different pair of rhymes for each quatrain increased the total number of rhymes in the English sonnet to seven, instead of the usual five, or four of the Italian form.

Many critics, considering the use of alternate rhyme a tacit confession that the strict scheme of the Italian form is too difficult, condemn the English sonnet on this ground. Remembering the characteristic thought development in the English sonnet, however, the use of alternate rhyme seems the best possible arrangement. "There is less impediment in this rhyme arrangement than in any other in accomplishing the purpose of having the emotion flow unchecked. The form of the English sonnet is nobly adapted to effect a high emotional feature, reaching its height in the third quatrain. Alternate rhymes aid to this end."[52]

Furthermore, this same critic maintains that continuous

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51. Ibid., pp. 128-129.

52. Meredith, D.C., The Sonnet, p. 33.

change of rhyme affords a rich verbal freshness, thereby enhancing the lyric beauty of the English sonnet, a form which was designed to express a certain sweetness of thought and mood. The smooth-flowing cadence of alternate rhyme helps to create this effect.

Moreover, since the theme is treated separately in each of the three quatrains, alternate rhyme provides ample opportunity for a wide variety of figures of speech, comparisons, contrasts, antitheses, not always easy to achieve within the bounds of one pair of rhymes.

As severely criticized by the formalists as the quatrain and alternate rhymes is the final couplet. It is true that the final couplet sometimes has the effect of clinching the thought contained in the preceding quatrains, and it is to be admitted that some of the Shakespearean sonneteers regarded the couplet as a kind of epigram that "should drive home the poetic nail to the head". Used in this manner, the couplet derives, oftentimes, a separate and distinct force, removed from the force of the sestet.

But in general, "the final couplets of Spenser and Sidney are seldom, if ever, stressed or insisted upon, and it is only by Shakespeare and occasionally by Drayton that any consciousness is shown in the matter."[53] When used skillfully, the couplet lends added power and charm to the sonnet.

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53. Crosland, T.W.H., The English Sonnet, p. 63.

On these aspects of its structure, then, the quatrain arrangement, the alternate rhyme, and the final couplet must of necessity rest the defense of the English sonnet. Two other lines of argument in its defense are found in the rhyme scheme which imposes sufficient restraint to prevent the sonnet's becoming a lawless form, and in the very fact that the form is still used by the best poets. Surely the fact that the English sonnet has survived three centuries of criticism is adequate proof of its poetic hardihood. Had the English sonnet not provided a framework worthy of the highest lyric expression, is it likely that so many of the first rate poets would have used it? Or that so many still use it today?

The full power and dignity of the English sonnet is only hinted in the high-flown expression "justification by works". Final proof of its efficacy, therefore, must rest on a more factual foundation, in so far as it is possible to reduce the products of poetic genius to mere formula and fact. As a manner of proof, then, the most satisfactory method seems to be a comparison and contrast of the Italian and the English sonnet as poetic forms. The comparison would not be made to the detriment of either form, but simply to show that the one ought not to be considered a dilute version of the other.

In order to illustrate quite clearly that the English sonnet has been used as effectively as the Italian, a series of sonnets has been chosen for comparison in the following manner: from the period of 1540-1640, for convenience called

the "sixteenth century", two pairs of sonnets have been selected; an Italian and English sonnet by the same poet, and an Italian and English sonnet by two different poets. In like fashion, two pairs of sonnets from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have been similarly treated. Because of changes in language, meanings of words, and general spirit, it has seemed unwise to attempt a comparison between sonnets of the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, or the sixteenth and twentieth centuries.

Let the following twelve sonnets, therefore, plead the case for the English sonnet.

From the sixteenth century have been chosen two sonnets, both dealing with the author's reaction to love, and both by the same author, Sir Philip Sidney. As a sonneteer, Sidney came more under the influence of the foreign masters than some of his contemporaries. Indeed, the "Astrophel and Stella" shows to what extent he was indebted to Ronsard, and more especially to Petrarch. Although not all the sonnets of this sequence are in the orthodox Italian form, some few are. One such is number thirty-one of the set, probably among Sidney's best known and most lovely sonnets:

"With how sad steps, O Moon, thou climbst the skies!
How silently, and with how wan a face!
What, may it be that even in heavenly place
That busy archer his sharp arrows tries!
Sure, if that long-with-love-acquainted eyes
Can judge of love, thou feel'st a lover's case,
I read it in thy looks; thy languisht grace
To me, that feel the like, thy state descries.
Then, even of fellowship, O Moon, tell me
Is constant love there deemed there but want of wit?
Are beauties there as proud as here they be?
Do they above love to be lov'd, and yet
Those lovers scorn whom that love doth posses?
Do they call virtue there ungratefullness?"[54]

Consider this sonnet first from the purely technical point of view. As an orthodox Italian sonnet, it is successful. The main divisions of octet and sestet are distinct. The full stop after the octet marks the proper volta, or turn, and it is the only full stop in the sonnet. As for the rhyme, the two rhymes of the octet are made on different combinations of consonants as well as different vowels. No rhyme of the octet is repeated in the sestet. And lastly, the rhyme scheme of the sonnet as a whole, a b b a a b b a c d c d e e, adheres to the rhyme prescribed for the Italian sonnet. In every respect, then, the canon of the Italian form has been obeyed to the letter.

Aesthetically and poetically as well as technically, the sonnet is ideal. Playing on a typical Petrarcan conceit, it develops the "lover complaineth" theme in a series of exclamations and questions addressed to the moon. The very way in which the questions are asked produces an effect of

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54. Sidney, Sir Philip, "Astrophel and Stella," no. 31, in The Renaissance, edited by Robert Whitney Bolwell, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929, p. 129.

gracefullness and lightness of spirit, which effect is due in part to the choice of such words as will produce an atmosphere of sadness by their sounds: the "wh", the simple "w", the "m", the "s", and the "l"; and the peculiar combination of long-drawn vowel sounds, as in "how sad steps, O Moon", contributes to the total effect of sadness. Surely such a sonnet would have delighted both Ronsard and Petrarch.

In quite a different strain, however, is another sonnet by Sidney, this time modeled on the English form. Written before 1585, this sonnet was not published until 1595 when it appeared in that edition of "The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia"[55] under the heading of "Certain Sonnets by Sir P. Sidney never before printed". Later this sonnet, together with Sidney's well known "Desire"[56] sonnet, were added to the one hundred and eight of the "Astrophel and Stella", and the two are now usually numbered as 109 and 110 of the sequence. There is, however, quite a difference between the sonnets of the "Astrophel and Stella" proper and the two appended. The one quoted below is the second of the two:

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55. Ault, Norman, ed., Elizabethan Lyrics, from the original texts chosen, edited, and arranged by Norman Ault, London, Longmans, Green and Co., 1925, p. 109.

56. These two were added to the "Astrophel and Stella" sequence by A.B. Grosart in his three-volume edition of Sidney's works published in London, 1877.

"Leave me, O Love, which reachest but to dust;
And thou my mind, aspire to higher things;
Grow rich in that which never taketh rust;
What ever fades, but fading pleasure brings.
Draw in thy beams, and humble all thy might
To that sweet yoke where lasting freedoms be,
Which breaks the clouds and opens forth the light
That both doth shine and give us light to see.
Oh, take fast hold! let that light be thy guide
In this small course which birth draws out to death,
And think how evil becometh him to slide
Who seeketh heaven, and comes of heavenly breath.
Then farewell world; thy uttermost I see:
Eternal Love, maintain thy life in me."[57]

Cast in the pure English mould, the above sonnet has all the strength and sweetness characteristic of Sidney's poetry. Yet conversely these characteristics are derived in part from the particular sonnet form into which they are cast.

The first quatrain states the thought, phrased as no one but Sidney could have phrased it:

"Leave me, O Love, which reachest but to dust;
And thou my mind, aspire to higher things;"

The second quatrain develops this thought in the first two lines, and in the last two builds up to the climax which is to come in the third quatrain. Having elaborated on the admonition to "let that light be thy guide", the third quatrain contains the emotional and poetic climax of the sonnet. Finally, the thought that has been logically developed in the preceding quatrains is concluded in the couplet. Thus the whole sonnet presents a smooth-flowing rise and fall of emotion. Aside from the sheer lyric quality of the poetry, one reason

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57. Sidney, Sir Philip, "Astrophel and Stella", appended, in The Renaissance, ed. by Bolwell, p. 135.

for the unchecked progress of both thought and emotional intensity is the use of alternate rhyme.

The early English sonneteers introduced alternate rhyme because the English language has fewer similar rhyme sounds than the Italian.[58] What was evolved of necessity has proved an advantage. Sidney was too much of a poet not to realize the effectiveness of alternate rhyme.

In this particular sonnet, Sidney has been careful to choose masculine rhyme, for only the monosyllable could produce the effect of force he wished to achieve. This was no wishy-washy sonnet, but an outburst quite equal in temper to some of Shakespeare's, or Drayton's.

Furthermore, the change of rhyme sounds in each quatrain creates a sense of surging forward to something new. In the Italian sonnet, this feeling is singularly held in check by the recurrence of the "a" rhyme of the octet. No matter how powerful the force of thought in an Italian sonnet, it never quite gains the impetus that the freedom of alternate rhyme provides. It is doubtful indeed whether Sidney could have achieved the same degree of force had he chosen to express this thought in the form of an Italian sonnet.

After the thought has reached its height in the quatrain beginning, "Oh, take fast hold!", "then farewell world..." is the natural conclusion. In the couplet, Sidney

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58. Hillyer, Robert S., First Principles of Verse, Boston, The Writer, Inc., publishers, 1938, p. 54.

is not trying to point a moral, or turn an epigram. He is simply and poetically stating his reaction to the thought he has developed in the three quatrains. This being the case, the couplet introduces nothing new or startling, but as the logical consequence of the preceeding thoughts, blends harmoniously with the whole sonnet. In fact, this ending is anticipated from the ninth line on.

Judging from these two sonnets, it is quite clear that Sidney was as much a master of the English sonnet as he was of the Italian. The characteristic charm of each sonnet can be attributed, in part, to the form in which it is written. The Italian sonnet, true to its type, is light and graceful, almost wistful in the poet's desire to know if celestial lovers are as fickle as those on earth.

Expressing an almost bitter attitude toward love, the English sonnet is not less skillfully executed than the Italian, as many critics would claim. Rather, the English sonnet is admirably suited for so forthright an expression as this sonnet contains. The alternate rhyme gives the poet a chance to expand, as it were; his "explosive" thoughts are not restrained by few rhymes. The couplet provides the chance for an artistic conclusion to the whole, which may or may not be used as a "final hammer-stroke", as the poet wishes. Sidney, evidently, preferred a quiter ending.

Both sonnets may be grouped with the other great lyric flights in the English language, and each in its own poetic

medium is as effective as the other.

Owing to the general spirit of experimentation prevalent among English poets of the sixteenth century, few sonneteers actually used the strictest Italian form. Those who pretended to use it usually show a marked tendency to rhyme the last two lines of the sestet on the "e" rhyme, thereby producing the effect of a final couplet. Most preferred a variation, however, be it only the double "e" rhyme; many based their sonnets on Wyatt's form; and some altered even this form. Although sonnets thus varied contain the conventional allegories and conceits commonly found in the Petrarcan form, they must, since they do not adhere strictly to the established pattern, be called "Italianate".

In all correctness, many of William Drummond's sonnets must be described as Italianate. None the less lovely because of the poet's alterations, Drummond's sonnets are frequently based on Wyatt's scheme (a b b a a b b a c d d c e e). For some reason, Drummond invariably reversed the first two rhymes of the second quatrain of the octet, so that his octet becomes a b b a b a b a. But since the eighth line is still the octet-concluding "a" rhyme, the total effect is not altered so seriously as it would have been had the last two lines been twisted around.

Aside from the above mentioned variation, Drummond's sonnets, full of luxuriant sound and colour, full of delicious imagery and phraseology tempered by a certain pensive reason,

or thoughtfulness, are perhaps more Italian in spirit than those of his contemporaries. In speaking of Drummond, Hazlitt remarks that "his sonnets are in the highest degree elegant, harmonious, and striking. It appears to me that they are more in the manner of Petrarch than any others that we have..."[59]

One such sonnet by Drummond, based on Wyatt's form and containing the reversed rhyme, is the following:

"Sleep, Silence' child, sweet father of soft rest,
Prince whose approach peace to all mortals brings,
Indifferent host to shepherds and to kings,
Sole comforter of minds with grief opprest;
Lo, by thy charming-rod all breathing things
Lie slumbering, with forgetfulness possest,
And yet, o'er me to spread thy drowsy wings
Thou spares, alas! who cannot be thy guest.
Since I am thine, O come but with that face
To inward light which thou art wont to show;
With feigned solace ease a true-felt woe;
Or if, dear god, thou do deny that grace,
Come as thou wilt, and what thou wilt bequeath,-
I long to kiss the image of my death.[60]

Forgetting for a moment the rhyme scheme, which after all is not the final test of a sonnet's greatness, consider Drummond's sonnet as a more felicitous expression of Petrarchism than some of his more monotonous regular sonnets. Surely, if the subject matter of an Italian sonnet should be reflective, this apostrophe to sleep would be ranked as a most poetic reflection indeed. How better could sleep have been turned into an unforgettable line than:

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59. Hazlitt, William, Lectures on the Literature of the Age of Elizabeth, ed., 1870, pp. 177-181.

60. Drummond, William, in A Treasury of English Sonnets, comp. by David M. Main, p. 58.

"Indifferent host to shepherds and to kings".

The whole fourteen lines, with the possible exception of the second, are ruled as they should be by accent rather than by beat.

In the matter of more fundamental rhyme, Drummond has observed the rules of the Italian form. He has avoided double rhymes, he has repeated no rhyme of the octet in the sestet, and he has made the rhymes of the octet on different combinations of consonants as well as on different vowel sounds.

As for the two main divisions of an Italian sonnet, Drummond has made the proper turn at the end of the eighth line, and the turn is, as it should be, the only legitimate break in the sonnet. The dash after the thirteenth line is used more as an over-ambitious comma, than a true pause. And the last line,

"I long to kiss the image of my death."

is a powerful conclusion to the thought that began so gently in the first line.

For producing such poetry, then, Drummond may be forgiven his reversed rhyme. The concensus of opinion among critics seems to be that this sonnet deserves a place not only among Drummond's best sonnets, but a place with the best of that large group of sonnets dealing with sleep.[61]

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61. Among the best known of this group are:
"Come sleep! O sleep, the certain knot of peace" - Sidney

"Care-charmer sleep, sweet ease in misery." - Griffen.
A steal from Daniel's sonnet on sleep.

"O soft embalmer of the still midnight." - Keats

From this group of "sleep" sonnets, has been selected for purposes of contrast a sonnet modeled on the English form. This particular sonnet is number fourty-nine of Samuel Daniel's sequence, "Delia":

"Care-charmer Sleep, son of the sable night,
Brother to death, in silent darkness born:
Relieve my anguish, and restore the light;
With dark forgetting of my care return!
And let the day be time enough to mourn
The shipwreck of my ill-adventured youth:
Let waking eyes suffice to wail their scorn,
Without the torment of the night's untruth.
Cease, dreams, the images of day-desires,
To model forth the passions of the morrow;
Never let rising sun approve you liars,
To add more grief to aggravate my sorrow.
Still let me sleep, embracing clouds in vain;
And never wake to feel the day's disdain."[62]

Somehow, after that noble first line, the reader half expects to hear (or see),

"Of Cerberus and darkest midnight born..."

but in his second line, Daniel has produced a close second to Milton's memorable line with,

"Brother to death,[63] in silent darkness born;"

Having thus addressed sleep, the poet proceeds to give his reasons for the urgency of his request. The first two lines of the second quatrain furnish a provocative allusion to the "antecedent action" of the sonnet, and further explain why the poet wishes to forget the cares of the world. In the third

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62. Daniel, Samuel, "Care-charmer Sleep," in A Treasury of English Sonnets, compiled by David M. Main, p. 24.

63. For a detailed discussion of this phrase, "Brother to death", one that occurs often in English poetry, see Main pp. 270-272.

quatrain, the desire for dreamless sleep is uppermost in the poet's thoughts. But in the couplet, the "futility of it all" makes him wish never to wake. Although the whole affair is a delightful Elizabethan conceit, there is an echo of truth in the sonnet that reminds one of Shakespeare's sentiment,

"In sleep a King, but waking no such matter."

As a poetic technician, the "aimiable Daniel" is often compared to Shakespeare. "...Perhaps what most distinguishes Daniel from the majority of his contemporaries," says Mr. Main, "...is the singular modernness of his style, his love of our language and literature for their own sakes, and the almost Wordsworthian nobleness of spirit in which he followed the Poet's calling."[64]

Indeed there is a modern simplicity in Daniel's style. The very words proceed in a forthright order unhampered by clumsy inversions. From this simplicity, the sonnet gains a strength characteristic of the English form.

Conversely, a technical provision of the English sonnet, alternate rhyme, allows a more natural word order; in turn, the more natural the word order, the greater the force of the thoughts. Consider the lines:

"And let the day be time enough to mourn
The shipwreck of my ill-adventured youth:..."

Had Daniel been forced, by one pair of rhymes, to invert any part of that thought, much of its poetic strength would have

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64. Main, A Treasury of English Sonnets, pp. 267-268.

been lost. So once again alternate rhyme, as a characteristic of the English sonnet form, has proved its value.

Judging from the degree of technical skill and poetic ability both Drummond and Daniel exhibit in their respective sonnets, it is safe to conclude that these two sonnets on sleep are equally effective, and each characteristic of the form in which it has been expressed.

Of all the nineteenth century sonneteers, perhaps the one who used both the Italian and English sonnet forms with most success was John Keats, and even he had designs on the sonnet form. In a letter to his brother George, Keats explains an experiment he has tried by saying:

> "I have been endeavouring to discover a better Sonnet Stanza than we have. The legitimate does not suit the language well, from the pouncing rhymes; the other appears too elegiac, and the couplet at the end of it seldom has a pleasing effect. I do not pretend to have succeeded. It will explain itself."[65]

Below is the experiment to which Keats referred in the letter:

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65. Forman, H. Buxton, ed., The Complete Poetical Works of John Keats, p. 436.

"If by dull rhymes our English must be chain'd,
And, like Andromeda, the Sonnet sweet
Fetter'd, in spite of pained loveliness;
Let us find out, if we must be constrain'd,
Sandals more interwoven and complete
To fit the naked foot of poesy;
Let us inspect the lyre, and weigh the stress
Of every chord, and see what may be gain'd
By ear industrious, and attention meet;
Misers of sound and syllable, no less
Than Midas of his coinage, let us be
Jealous of dead leaves in the bay wreath crown,
So, if we may not let the Muse be free,
She will be bound with garlands of her own."[66]

The above passage is extremely lovely poetry, to be sure, and quite characteristic of Keats' "most musical, most melancholy muse", but it is hardly a sonnet. The only slight resemblance it bears to the sonnet is in the number of rhymes, not even the arrangement of these rhymes. Of this experiment Mr. Forman remarks:

> "Keats' success both in the 'legitimate' and the 'other' (by which he means the Shakespearean sonnet) is far more notable than in the present charming experiment."[67]

Of Keats' orthodox sonnets, the two that first come to mind for purposes of contrast are the stately, "Much have I travelled in the realms of gold" and the melancholy, "When I have fears that I may cease to be". Since these two have already been exhaustively treated by the critics, another pair has been selected: number nine of the seventeen sonnets published in 1817, "Keen, fitful gusts are whisp'ring here and there", and the very last poem Keats wrote, "Bright star, were

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66. Ibid., p. 436.

67. Forman, loc. cit.

I as stedfast as thou art".

Below is the Italian sonnet:

"Keen, fitful gusts are whisp'ring here and there
Among the bushes half leafless and dry;
The stars look very cold about the sky,
And I have many miles on foot to fare.
Yet feel I little of the cool bleak air,
Or of the dead leaves rustling drearily,
Or of those silver lamps that burn on high,
Or of the distance from home's pleasant lair:
For I am brimfull of the friendliness
That in a little cottage I have found;
Of fair-hair'd Milton's eloquent distress,
And all his love for gentle Lycid drown'd:
Of lovely Laura in her light green dress,
And faithfull Petrarch gloriously crown'd."[68]

In this sonnet, Keats has kept to the proper spirit of the Italian form with remarkable fidelity. He has observed the rule that the only legitimate break be made at the end of the eighth line. To be sure, he uses a colon, and begins the sestet with "for", but nevertheless he makes the turn at the proper place. He repeats no rhyme of the octet in the sestet, and for the octet uses rhymes made on different combinations of vowel and consonant sounds. In the sestet, he uses only two rhymes, one of the two preferred schemes for the strict Petrarcan sestet. Finally, then in the total rhyme scheme, Keats has conformed to the established model. So far as the technical construction of this sonnet is concerned, Keats has fulfilled the demands of the Italian sonnet.

No less in keeping with the Italian manner of this sonnet is the atmosphere. Keats was a master at creating word

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68. Forman, p. 449.

effects, partly through his fondness for alliteration and partly through the singularly musical combinations of vowel sounds he achieved. Any mediocre poet can arrange poetic sounds scientifically so as to produce the desired effect, but Keats did it instinctively. For example, the lines:

> "Keen, fitful gusts are whisp'ring here and there
> Among the bushes half leafless and dry..."

suggest, in words especially chosen for their curtness, the dry, rasping sound made by dry leaves without actually using the word "rustle", which Keats wished to save for another line in the sonnet.

The sestet contains two notable examples of Keats' skillfull use of consonance. The "f" sound predominates in the lines:

> "For I am brimfull of the friendliness
> That in a little cottage I have found..."

and in the last four lines:

> "Of fair-hair'd Milton's eloquent distress,
> And all his love for gentle Lycid drown'd;
> Of lovely Laura in her light green dress,
> And faithful Petrarch gloriously crown'd."

the "l" sound makes the lines extremely melodious.

This sonnet, then, considered in its technical and artistic aspects, is indeed as successful an Italian sonnet as the critics would hope to find. In it, Keats has combined the rigid structure of the Italian sonnet form with that certain grace of expression so characteristic of his own poetic genius.

Equally graceful is Keats' sonnet in the English form,

"Bright star, were I as stedfast as thou art". Composed in 1820, this sonnet was written in a copy of Shakespeare's poems beneath the fly-title to "A Lover's Complaint", just as though "in that mournful moment Keats desired to appropriate to his last poetic utterance a style and title already immortal".[69]

The sonnet is quoted as it appears in the original copy, now in the possession of Sir Charles Dilke:

> "Bright star, were I as stedfast as thou art-
> Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night
> And watching, with eternal lids apart,
> Like nature's patient, sleepless Eremite,
> The moving waters at their priestlike task
> Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,
> Or gazing at the new soft-fallen mask
> Of snow upon the mountains and the moors-
> No- yet still stedfast, still unchangeable,
> Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast,
> To feel forever its soft fall and swell,
> And wake forever in a sweet unrest,
> Still, still to be near her tender-taken breath,
> And so live ever, or else swoon to death."[70]

This English sonnet, like many of Drayton's, is not sharply divided into quatrains. It is, rather, a complete unit, a continuous piling up of emotion that reaches its climax in the couplet. From the start, it must be admitted that the second line of the couplet (the last line of the sonnet) which should have been a strong line poetically, is unfortunately the weakest of the whole sonnet. Critics have always bewailed Keats' descent from the high level of poetry he achieved in the other thirteen lines.

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69. Forman, p. 449.

70. Forman, The Complete Poetical Works of John Keats, p. 449-450.

When Keats wrote this sonnet, he realized only too clearly that his life was fast slipping away, and it may be that the chill wind of this presentiment caused the flame of his poetic genius to flicker and burn low. For the beauty of the rest of the sonnet, Keats may be forgiven this one feeble line.

One chief source of this sonnet's charm is derived from a characteristic feature of the English sonnet form, namely: the use of alternate rhyme. Because of the change in rhyme, note how smoothly the feeling of solemn tenderness flows through the first eight lines unhindered. Even here the pause is so slight that it constitutes not a full stop, but merely a pensive reflection. Almost immediately the main thought is picked up and carried to its conclusion.

Had Keats chosen to express this same thought in the Italian sonnet form, it is unlikely that he could have achieved the continuous surge of feeling which the use of alternate rhyme permits. The conclusive effect of the recurring "a" rhyme of the octet (previously discussed on p. 48) would prove none the less conclusive in this case.

A second source of charm in this particular sonnet is Keats' use of assonance and consonance. The conscious choice of such words as, "pure ablution round earth's human shores", "of snow upon the mountains and the moors", produces a general tone of gentleness singularly appropriate for the main thought of the sonnet.

Having reviewed the technical and aesthetic aspects of

"Bright star", it may be concluded that as an English sonnet it is successful. One hundred and twenty-five years of criticism have not dimmed its brightness. For these reasons, therefore, it may rightly be claimed that this English sonnet has been as effectively executed as Keats' Italian sonnet, and that it is as much a measure of the poet's genius as the Italian.

Among the best sonneteers of the middle-to-late nineteenth century are Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Wilfrid Scawen Blunt. Rosetti's sonnets are written exclusively in the Italian form; Blunt's are patterned on the English sonnet. From "Change and Fate", the second part of Rossetti's House of Life sequence, number seventy has been chosen for comparison with number twelve of Blunt's sequence, Esther. Although the subject treated is different in each sonnet, both are admirably drawn word-pictures. Below is Rossetti's, which describes the lazy contentment of an autumn day:

> "The sunlight shames November where he grieves
> In dead red leaves, and will not let him shun
> The day, though bough with bough be over-run.
> But with a blessing every glade receives
> High salutation; while from hillock-eaves
> The deer gaze calling, dappled white and dun,
> As if, being foresters of old, the sun
> Had marked them with the shade of forest leaves.
> Here dawn today unveiled her magic glass;
> Here noon now gives the thirst and takes the dew;
> Till eve brings rest when other good things pass.
> And here the lost hours the lost hours renew
> While I still lead my shadow o'er the grass,
> Nor know, for longing, that which I should do."[71]

Speaking of Rosetti as a sonneteer, Mr. Crosland points

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71. Peterson, Houston, ed., The Book of Sonnet Sequences, p. 273.

out, "we shall not admit that he was a writer of great sonnets; but he was a great symbolist and a great formalist, and he wrote sonnets in quantity."[72]

Of the "quantity", the one quoted above, usually titled "Autumn Idleness", is not only an example of Dante Gabriel's formalism, it is one of his more coherent creations in the sonnet form. From first line to last line, it has the unity of thought and feeling that a true Italian sonnet should have.

A purely technical inspection of the sonnet proves that Rosetti has adhered to the established rules of the Italian form. He has made clear the two major divisions, and has made the turn, not too soon, not too late. He has chosen for the octet rhymes made on different consonant and vowel sounds, and he has repeated no rhyme of the octet in the sestet. Furthermore, he has used only two rhymes for the sestet, thereby determining the whole rhyme scheme as one of the two preferred for the Italian sonnet.

As for word-pictures, this sonnet abounds in them. For instance,

> "The sunlight shames November where he grieves
> In dead red leaves..."

compresses into eleven words of figurative language what the artist spreads over a three by four foot canvas. Yet the effect is just as powerful, for the few words set the mind's eye to filling in the detail that the physical eye would take

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72. Crosland, T.W.H., The English Sonnet, p. 67.

in at a glance.

And again, the word-picture of the deer is carefully "painted". Inimitable is the description "dappled white and dun, as if...the sun had marked them with the shade of forest leaves."

Viewed from all angles, "Autumn Idleness" is both technically and artistically in keeping with the spirit and execution of the Italian sonnet.

Just as effective as Rossetti's description of autumn is Blunt's finely drawn word-portrait of the little nun, quoted below:

"She was a little woman dressed in black
Who stood on tiptoe with a childish air,
Her face and figure hidden in a sacque,
All but her eyes and forehead and dark hair.
Her brow was pale, but it was lit with light,
And mirth flashed out of it, it seemed in rays.
A childish face, but wise with woman's wit,
And something, too, pathetic in its gaze.
In the bare dusk of that unseemly place
I noted all, and this besides, a scar
Which on her cheek had left a paler trace.
It seemed to tell its tale of love and war.
That little scar! Doubt whispered of this one,
Boy as I was, she had not lived a nun."[73]

The first quatrain presents the groundwork of the portrait, including such touches as "little woman", and "childish air" to whet the imagination. The second quatrain fills in more of the details, especially provocative in the lines:

"A childish face, but wise with woman's wit,
And something, too, pathetic in its gaze."

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73. Peterson, Houston, The Book of Sonnet Sequences, p. 308.

The third quatrain completes the picture and contains the climax of the sonnet in the last three lines:

> "...a scar
> Which on her cheek had left a paler trace.
> It seemed to tell its tale of love and war."

After the climax, the couplet, closely related as it is to the thought of the third quatrain, comes as a reaction to the whole picture of the preceding quatrains. Used in this fashion, the couplet fits into the pattern and sense of the whole sonset, thereby making the sonnet an artistic poetic unit.

In this sonnet especially, the use of a different pair of rhymes for each quatrain helps to create a sense of increasing suspense. As the details of the picture are filled in, quatrain by quatrain, notice how the alternate rhyme, by allowing the sonnet to move swiftly, sustains the suspense until the tenth line. Thus the rhyme scheme has proved its worth by contributing to the artistic execution of the sonnet.

Taken together, then, "Autumn Idleness", and what for convenience may be titled "The Little Nun" represent the sonneteering of their respective poets. As word-pictures, these sonnets describe two entirely different objects. But the object of the art is not the prime consideration for our purpose. More important is whether the poet has achieved the most artistic and effective description of the object in the form-medium, if you will--chosen for the expression.

This being the case, "The Little Nun" in the English sonnet form is equally as effective as "Autumn Idleness" in

the Italian. As word-artists, Rossetti and Blunt created as different pictures on the printed page as Turner and Velasquez did on the canvas. But does the difference between them imply that one was less of an artist than the other? Therein lies the very point that the thesis attempts to prove, namely: that the difference between the English and Italian sonnet forms does not necessarily imply the inferiority of the one, or the superiority of the other.

Even in the twentieth century the English sonnet finds favour with leading poets. Chief among those who choose to express their thoughts in this form are Conrad Aiken, Robinson Jeffers, and Edna St. Vincent Millay.

Of this trio, the one least connected with the sonnet is Conrad Aiken. His fame usually rests on such powerful blank verse poems as "Tetelestai" and "King Borborigmi", and his five long works, The Charnel Rose, The Jig of Forslin, The House of Dust, Senlin, and The Pilgrimage of Festus.

During the winter of 1926-27, however, he composed a group of nine sonnets all in the English form. Commenting on these nine sonnets, Mr. Peterson claims,

> "It is too early to evaluate them definitely but they seem to be in the great tradition, with something of Shakespeare's power and Donne's complexity."[74]

By way of illustrating Mr. Peterson's comment, the first of the set of nine sonnets is quoted below:

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74. Peterson, Houston, The Book of Sonnet Sequences, p. 432.

"Broad on the sunburnt hill the bright moon comes,
And cuts with silver horn the hurrying cloud,
And the cold Pole Star, in the dusk, resumes
His last night's light, which light alone could shroud.
And legion other lights, that torch pursuing,
Take each their stations in the deepening night,
Lifting pale tapers for the Watch, renewing
Their glorious foreheads in the infinite.
Never before had night so many eyes.
Never was darkness so divinely thronged
As now--my love! bright star!--when you arise,
Giving me back the night which I had wronged.
Now with your voice sings all the immortal host,
This god of myriad stars whom I thought lost."[75]

Like Aiken, Robinson Jeffers is better known by his long poems, Roan Stallion, Tamar and Other Poems (1926), The Women at Point Sur (1927), Cawdor (1928), and Dear Judas (1929). He has, however, written some sonnets which ought to be included in a discussion of the English sonnet in the twentieth century.

Jeffers' poetry "communicates with force if not with power (a) stormy vigor...The philosophy (expressed in it) is negative, repetitious, dismal."[76] Something of this same spirit of negation is felt in his sonnets. As illustration of these qualities, the following sonnet, titled by the lone word, "Compensation", is quoted:

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75. Ibid., p. 433.

76. Untermeyer, Louis, Modern American Poetry, p. 403.

"Solitude that unmakes me one of men
In snow-white hands brings singular recompense,
Evening me with kindlier natures when
On the needled pinewood the cold dews condense
About the hour of Rigel fallen from heaven
In wintertime, or when the long night tides
Sigh blindly from the sand-dune backward driven,
Or when on stormwings of the northwind rides
The foamscud with the cormorants, or when passes
A horse or dog with brown affectionate eyes,
Or autumn frosts are pricked by earliest grasses,
Or whirring from her covert a quail flies.
Why even in humanity, beauty and good
Show from the mountainside of solitude."[77]

In this particular sonnet, the number of run-on lines makes it read more like blank verse than a true sonnet. Other sonnets by Jeffers that have more of the sonnet "tone" are, "Promise of Peace" and "Love the Wild Swan".

As sonneteers, Aiken and Jeffers both represent the modern age. Their sonnets, no less than their long poems, reflect the irregular, almost harsh expression that in poetry is labelled "the modern idiom". Whether or not their sonnets have suffered because of the "modern idiom" is a debatable point. But it is quite clear that the poet who has kept to the spirit of the sonnet, as well as the outward form, has achieved a larger measure of success than either Aiken or Jeffers. That poet is Edna St. Vincent Millay.

Without a doubt, Miss Millay is the greatest of the three. As a sonneteer, she has proved equally skillful in both the English and Italian forms. In her sonnets, she has run "the extraordinary gamut of her genius from flippant gaiety and

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77. Untermeyer, loc. cit.

that Elizabethan lightness of touch which Milton banished from the sonnet, to tragedy and austere dignity."[78]

It is this lightness of touch that makes Untermeyer describe Miss Millay as a "belated Elizabethan". And in many respects she is just that. "In her inversions and archaic epithets", continues Untermeyer, "her 'forsooths' and 'alacks', ...she uses locutions which ordinarily have a false and affected ring."[79]

From Miss Millay's sonnets, two have been chosen for comparison, both dealing with the theme of "lost love", a common theme in her poetry. Below is the Italian sonnet:

"What lips my lips have kissed, and where, and why
I have forgotten, and what arms have lain
Under my head till morning; but the rain
Is full of ghosts tonight, that tap and sigh
Upon the glass and listen for reply;
And in my heart there stirs a quiet pain
For unremembered lads that not again
Will turn to me at midnight with a cry.

Thus in winter stands the lonely tree,
Nor knows what birds have vanished one by one,
Yet knows its boughs more silent than before:
I cannot say what loves have come and gone;
I only know that summer sang in me
A little while, that in me sings no more."[80]

Herein Miss Millay has observed the rules regarding the technical structure of an Italian sonnet. She has rhymed the octet on two different consonant and vowel sounds; she has used no

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78. Peterson, Houston, The Book of Sonnet Sequences, p. 400.

79. Untermeyer, Louis, ed., Modern American Poetry, p. 483.

80. Untermeyer, Modern American Poetry, p. 490.

rhyme of the octet in the sestet; she has observed the turn with proper "Italian Spirit"; and for the whole rhyme scheme, with the exception of the second tercet which is slightly reversed, she has followed one of the two prescribed schemes for the Italian sonnet. In so far as the pure poetics is concerned, Miss Millay has proved her mastery of the Italian form.

Mere mastery of the technical structure of a sonnet, without the appropriate spirit to complement the form, is poetic mockery. A combination of these two elements is required for the ideal sonnet.

In this sonnet, Miss Millay has admirably succeeded in choosing figures that are modern, and at the same time in keeping with the form in which they are used. The octet contains the more modern expression; the sestet contains several examples of the archaisms for which Miss Millay is noted.

The likening of herself to the "lonely tree" in the first tercet, for example, is a figure old enough to be everlastingly new in poetry. And the phrase "nor knows..." produces a delightfully quaint echo of antiquity in the sonnet.

Much of this same feeling is found in Miss Millay's English sonnet titled, "Pity me not", quoted below:

"Pity me not because the light of day
At close of day no longer walks the sky;
Pity me not for beauties passed away
From field and thicket as the year goes by;
Pity me not the waning of the moon,
Nor that the ebbing tide goes out to sea,
Nor that a man's desire is hushed so soon,
And you no longer look with love on me.
This I have known always: love is no more
Than the wide blossom which the wind assails;
Than the great tide that treads the shifting shore,
Strewing fresh wreckage gathered in the gales.
Pity me that the heart is slow to learn
What the swift mind beholds at every turn."[81]

As well as demonstrating her dexterity with the English sonnet form, Miss Millay has proved herself a master of rhetoric. By her choice of words she has created a tone of sweetness and strength similar to the tone felt in Sidney's sonnets. The first two lines, for instance, by their calculated repetition, prove the point:

"Pity me not because the light of day
At close of day no longer walks the sky;..."

The first phrase of those two lines, "pity me not", is indeed a rhetorical masterstroke. The triple rhythm, resulting from the substitution of a dactyl for the first iambic foot of the line, lends a curiously pathetic tone to the whole two lines; and since by the use of a dactyl the emphasis falls on the negative, the effect is doubly pathetic.

The key phrase "pity me not", repeated twice in the first two quatrains, builds up to the climax in the third quatrain, "This have I known always:", and prepares for the

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81. Untermeyer, Modern American Poetry, p. 490.

affirmative in the couplet:

"Pity me that the heart is slow to learn
What the swift mind beholds at every turn."

Moreover, the fast-moving rhythm of the phrase when used the first time sets the sonnet in motion, and each time it is used thereafter keeps the sonnet moving swiftly to its climax. Just as the recurring dactyl provides a springboard for the emotional development in the first two quatrains, so the use of alternate rhyme permits the emotion to reach its climax as smoothly as possible.

In each case, that for which the reader must pity her not, is distinguished by a change in rhyme. The net result is to make each "pity me not" a memorable unit of the whole.

Not only does Miss Millay incorporate skillful rhetorical effects in this sonnet, she also makes use of some of the more commonplace devices for achieving poetic effect. For example, the line;

"Nor that a man's desire is hushed so soon"

is a splendid use of consonance to connote that subtle thought. "Hushed" is indeed a "mot juste".

The very next line:

"And you no longer look with love on me."

contains melodious alliteration of the letter "l". And still another ace in the poet's deck, onomatapoeia, is found in the line:

"Than the great tide that treads the shifting shore,"

In the effective combination of "t's", "d's", and in the "gr",

and "ft", and "sh", the grating of pebbles sucked back down the shingle is almost audible.

So far as the poetic execution goes, both of these sonnets are well done, the work of a first rate poet. Both deal with the theme of lost love, but each produces a different effect on the reader. Why? Because the effect is derived, in part, from the particular sonnet form in which the theme is cast. The Italian sonnet, characteristic of its type, is gentler, more wistful in feeling. The English sonnet is more direct, more forceful. Since each is true to its type, therefore, the English sonnet is as effective an expression of the thought as the Italian sonnet.

For the last comparison of the series, that between an Italian and English sonnet by different authors of the twentieth century, the following two have been chosen: Elinor Wylie's "Puritan Sonnet" in the Italian form, and Robert Hillyer's English sonnet titled "As One Who Bears Beneath His Neighbor's Roof".

First consider Mrs. Wylie's Italian sonnet, quoted below:

"Down to the Puritan marrow of my bones
There's something in this richness that I hate.
I love the look, austere, immaculate,
Of landscapes drawn in pearly monotones.
There's something in my very blood that owns
Bare hills, cold silver on a sky of slate,
A thread of water, churned to milky spate,
Streaming through slanting pastures fenced with stones.
I love those skies, thin blue or snowy gray,
Those fields sparse-planted, rendering meager sheaves;
That spring, briefer than apple-blossom's breath,
Summer, so much too beautiful to stay,
Swift autumn, like a bonfire of leaves,
And sleepy winter, like the sleep of death."[82]

From the purely structural aspects, no fault could be found with this sonnet. Mrs. Wylie, the flawless technician, has observed the turn in the proper place and with the proper spirit. She has rhymed the octet on two rhymes of different consonant and vowel sounds; and for the total rhyme scheme, she has adhered strictly to the Petrarcan pattern, using the permissible three rhymes in the sestet. Singularly appropriate to the thought of the sonnet is the rigid form she has chosen for its framework.

Carried still farther, the Puritannical atmosphere pervades even the figures of speech employed in the sonnet, as for instance, "cold silver on a sky of slate". The very words have a terseness, an austerity suggestive of the tight-lipped Puritan. Still another means of conveying the suggestion of Puritannical, rigid simplicity, is the use of monosyllabic words, as in the line:

"I love those skies, thin blue or snowy gray,..."

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82. Untermeyer, Modern American Poetry, p. 325.

All the words in it but one are monosyllabic, and like most "Puritan" words, they imply more than they actually say.

In her "Puritan Sonnet", then, Mrs. Wylie has so skillfuly blended the elements of thought and form that the resulting sonnet gains the highest possible degree of effectiveness. Such is the goal of poetry written in the great tradition of the sonnet form, and Mrs. Wylie's sonnet has reached the goal.

Writing in the other traditional sonnet form is Robert Hillyer. Criticizing Hillyer as a poet, Untermeyer remarks:

> "His technique and idiom are traditional...his utterance though full of foreign and unmistakable accents, has unmistakable authority...his work reveals (as Hillyer wrote of Santayana) 'dignity and sumptuousness of phrasing'."[83]

These qualities are well illustrated in the English sonnet quoted below:

> "As one who bears beneath his neighbor's roof
> Some thrust that staggers his unready wit
> And brooding through the night on such reproof
> Too late conceives the apt reply to it,
> So all our life is but an afterthought,
> A puzzle solved long past the time of need,
> And tardy wisdom that one failure bought
> Finds no occasion to be used in deed.
> Fate harries us; we answer not a word,
> Or answering too late, we waste our breath;
> Not even a belated quip is heard
> From those who bore the final taunt of death.
> And thus the Jester parries all retort:
> His jest eternal, and our lives so short."[84]

In sureness of technique and degree of poetic expression, Hillyer's sonnet belongs to the great tradition of Drayton and

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83. Untermeyer, Modern American Poetry, p. 546.

84. Untermeyer, Modern American Poetry, p. 546.

Shakespeare. The first two quatrains, using the "as-so" device of the Elizabethan sonneteers, contain the theme that "all our life is but an afterthought". The third quatrain carries the theme to its climax in "we waste our breath"; and the couplet comments on the whole expression of futility.

Like many of Drayton's sonnets, this one of Hillyer's is not divided sharply into three quatrains. Instead, the sense hurries along to the eighth line before a line is end-stopped. Although there is no punctuation to indicate the individual quatrains, the feeling of distinct quatrain division is gained by the use of alternate rhyme.

The figure beginning "As one who bears" is made on the first pair of rhymes; the second half of the figure, "so all our life...", made on the c d c d rhyme, gives the impression of being a separate quatrain, whereas it is actually completing the "as-so" construction. Since the thought of the entire sonnet is such a closely knit unit, the feeling of quatrain division characteristic of the English sonnet is achieved through another element of that form, alternate rhyme.

Once again the essential characteristics of the English sonnet form, quatrain division, alternate rhyme, the couplet ending, have proved their worth in combining to form a total structure suitable as a medium for the expression of great poetry.

As poetry, both Mrs. Wylie's Italian sonnet and Mr. Hillyer's English sonnet possess that mark of greatness, figures

of speech, or lines that remain firmly in mind after the book has been closed. For instance, the four lines from the "Puritan Sonnet":

> "There's something in my very blood that owns
> Bare hills, cold silver on a sky of slate,
> A thread of water, churned to milky spate,
> Streaming through slanted pastures fenced with stones."

or the second quatrain from Mr. Hillyer's English sonnet:

> "So all our life is but an afterthought
> A puzzle solved long past the time of need,
> And tardy wisdom that one failure bought
> Finds no occasion to be used in deed."

have a certain poetic appeal that makes them truly memorable. Of such is great poetry made.

Both sonnets, viewed in this light, are good poetry, certainly among the best our age has produced. Each has achieved, in the characteristics of the form used, an equal degree of effectiveness. It is hoped that in the comparison of these six pairs of sonnets the point has been demonstrated with equal effectiveness.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The last half of the sixteenth century saw the beginnings of English nationalism. During the reign of Henry VIII, the establishing of a national church and the passing of the Act of Supremacy created a feeling of national unity hitherto unfelt in England. In Elizabeth's time, the growth of England's economic and political power intensified this spirit of nationalism. As a result, patriotic Englishmen began to evidence interest in their own country, its history, its customs, and its people.

Literature provided an excellent opportunity for the renewed expression of an appreciation of things English. In the last quarter of the century appeared such works as Holinshed's Chronicles, Hakluyt's Voyages, Drayton's patriotic poem dealing with the Barons' Wars Poly-Olbion, and Daniel's History of the Civil Wars between the Two Houses of York and Lancaster, another history in verse. Not to mention Shakespeare's historical plays, of course. All these are straws showing that the wind was blowing in over the English Channel.

Just such an index of the times is the English sonnet. As it has been shown, Wyatt introduced the sonnet form into

English poetry from Italy, but his sonnets are nearly all slavish imitations of the Italian style, or direct translations of Petrarch. For this reason, Wyatt's sonnets are more Italianate than English.

To Surrey belongs the credit for having adapted the Italian form into the true English sonnet, later named for the greatest Elizabethan, the Shakespearean sonnet. Characteristically blunt though not inartistic, the structure of the English sonnet admirably reflects the English temperament. Typical of the English thought pattern which lays ideas out in orderly fashion and, lawyer-like, draws conclusions from them is the arrangement of the three quatrains and couplet. Taken on its own merits, then, the English sonnet form is as much a reflection of English national character as is the obedience to the unwritten conventions of the constitution.

"In general", says Mr. Bolwell, "the sonnet was a piece of international literary currency during the Rennaissance."[85] With Italian and English markets glutted with hundreds of second and third-rate sonnets, the English sonnet gave England a stabilizer of its own with which to counterbalance the inflation at home and abroad.

Furthermore, the English sonnet played an important role in the growing reaction against the "Italianate Englishman", whom Ascham in The Schoolmaster branded as "the devil

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85. Bolwell, Robert Whitney, The Renaissance, Introduction p. xxvi.

incarnate".

During the thirty years immediately following its introduction and development, the English sonnet form enjoyed great popularity. From Tudor days down to the early Stuart reigns, poets accomplished such magnificent poetry in that particular form that its success was assured. So firmly was the English sonnet established that it is still flourishing three centuries after its beginning. Thus Surrey's idea that England needed a sonnet form of its own has become a reality far surpassing his own modest imaginings.

On the basis of the English sonnets alone might be settled forever one of the most nonsensical bickerings in the world of poetry, the Bacon-Shakespeare controversy. Fancifully imagining Bacon's answer could he be challenged today, the English sonnet below expresses the common attitude in the matter:

> They say I penned Will Shakespeare's lusty lines
> And fixed his name, not wishing to betray
> My own, but wove within the metrical designs
> The gold thread of identity? They say,
> "No man of meager schooling could have wrought
> Such miracles with words--the facts don't fit--
> Another's genius shines through every thought"?
> A lack of books proves not a want of wit.
> What fools! my earthbound muse could no more seek
> Parnassus' mount than I could touch the moon!
> Its wings were clipped; much Latin and more Greek
> Had curbed the higher fancy's flight too soon.
> No poet I; in truth I cannot claim
> A thousandth portion of a poet's fame.

Finally, the question might well be asked, "Why bother to prove the case for the English sonnet at all? Hasn't some of the best poetry in the language, from Wyatt to Miss Millay,

provided adequate proof?" In one respect, the large body of famous English sonnets is more than sufficient proof that the form is valid. There is, however, and always has been, and probably always will be that group of metrical purists who frown on the English sonnet as decidedly inferior poetry.

Just as the shrill tone of the oboe can be heard above the whole orchestra, so the adverse criticism from this group stands out as an acid note in the symphony of poetical criticism.

Because of their dissenting views, such critics constantly demand an answer and must as constantly be answered. This thesis, in its way, attempts an answer.

BOSTON UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL

Abstract of Thesis

THE CASE FOR THE ENGLISH SONNET

by

Helen Pickering Skilton
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submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of

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The English or Shakespearean Sonnet has generally been considered by the majority of critics as a weak variation of the "pure" Italian form. Scorned as technically and artistically inferior to the strict Petrarcan sonnet, the English form has been berated for the very elements of structure that make it characteristically English, the three quatrain and couplet arrangement and the alternate rhyme. From these structural innovations, the English sonnet derives much of the sweetness and strength peculiar to the form.

To show that the English sonnet, because of the above-mentioned changes in form made in the attempt to reconcile the quantitative and qualitative systems of versification, is a valid poetic form is the chief problem of the thesis. What the thesis aims to prove is, briefly stated, this: granted that the Italian sonnet justly deserves the high praise it has received throughout the centuries, the English sonnet has been used with as much effect and poetic artistry by the best poets since the time of Wyatt.

Since English literature owes so much to Italian invention, the introduction to a discussion of the English sonnet ought to contain a clear understanding of the fundamental principles of the Italian form. The first chapter, therefore, traces the sonnet form in Italy from its origin to the time of Wyatt, showing how Italian sonneteers of the twelfth century established the first workable rules for its versification; how Dante in the thirteenth century, following the form of his

predecessors, fixed the form for all time; and how Petrarch, in the fifteenth century, made it popular.

Few sonnets were produced in the fifteenth century, because translations of the classics and the novels of Boccaccio turned literature in the direction of prose. At the end of the fifteenth century, however, the sonnet again came into use. For the most part, the fifteenth century sonneteers were rank imitators of Petrarch. They copied slavishly but lacked any spark of originality.

The Italian sonnet of the sixteenth century still observed the strict rules of rhyme and thought division laid down by Petrarch some two centuries earlier. The technical form, rigid as ever, had not changed, but the language was developing all the time away from the mystical, metaphysical, medieval tongue to the lusty vernacular.

This sonnet, then, is the one with which Sir Thomas Wyatt became acquainted in Italy, and the one which he introduced into England during the 1530's. Although Wyatt followed the strict Petrarcan octet, invariably rhymed a b b a a b b a, he altered the sestet by adding another quatrain on a similar rhyme pattern, c d d c, and by concluding with the e-rhymed couplet. Nearly all Wyatt's sonnets follow this rhyme scheme, and, with few exceptions, they are nearly all imitations of Petrarch. Wyatt's sonnets are, therefore, more Italianate than those of his fellow-partner in the movement, Surrey.

To Surrey belongs the credit for adapting the Italian

sonnet to a form more suitable for use by English poets. Faced with the problem of how to reconcile the quantitative and qualitative systems of versification, taking into account at the same time the constant developments in the English language itself, Surrey hit upon an admirable solution. His sonnet contained three quatrains of alternately rhymed iambic pentameter and a concluding couplet. The total number of rhymes had been increased from the four or five of the Italian form to seven, thereby making the total rhyming more adaptable to the English language which has fewer similar rhyme sounds than the Italian.

Surrey's sonnet, or as it came to be called the English sonnet, found favour with Elizabethan sonneteers. Extensive use of the English sonnet by the minor sonneteers made the form more workable and more natural than Surrey's first attempts. Among the best of the minor Elizabethan sonneteers were Daniel, Lodge, Giles Fletcher, Percy, and Henry Constable. These poets laid the foundations on which the major sonneteers built to greatness.

The four major Elizabethan sonneteers, Sidney, Spenser, Drayton, and Shakespeare firmly established the greatness of the English sonnet for all time. In their works, it became quite clear that Surrey's adaptations were valid and that the English sonnet was a legitimate form.

From the time of Wyatt and Surrey down to the twentieth century, the English sonnet form has continued in use. Surely

its survival is a strong argument for its validity. To the end of more concrete proof, however, twelve sonnets have been chosen for comparison and contrast. The twelve have been selected in the following manner: from the sixteenth century, an Italian and an English sonnet by the same poet, and an Italian and English sonnet by different poets; for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the same arrangement.

In each case, the comparison is made not to the detriment of either form, but merely to demonstrate that the English sonnet has been used as effectively as the Italian. The criterion of judgment in each instance has been the degree to which the sonnet in question has achieved its artistic effect through conformity to the canon of its form.

Finally, the English sonnet must be considered as an artistic index of the time in which it developed. With the growth of English nationalism, and with the decided reaction against things Italian, the English sonnet is as much an indication of English national character as the obedience to the conventions of the constitution. Viewed in this light, the English sonnet is truly English, and should be judged on its own merits.

APPENDIX

Some say that love is but the vanity
Of human hearts, the whim of fleeting days;
They cannot see in life the thousand ways
That love gives proof of its fidelity,
Nor do they know the deep humility
That's born of love; they but create a maze
Of insincerity, and doubt the praise
That others have for love's divinity.
My heart has told me quite a different tale,
For I find love the light of this dark life,
The spark that glows within the meanest clod,
The guide and stay without which all things fail,
Redeeming virtue in a world of strife,
Imperfect image of the love of God.

When tempted to bewail my loveless lot
And curse that wayward god who passed me by
Bestowing on others bliss that I have not,
When envy goads my tortured soul to cry
For its small share of love, so long past due;
Then love commands my rebel heart be still
And stem the tide of discontent with new
Remembering of matchless hours. The thrill
Begot by fleeting fancy, sorrow's child,
May never, through strange alchemy of fate,
Become the solid gold of undefiled
Serenity, reward of those who wait.
Having this much, I know myself thrice blessed;
But oh, my heart, be patient for the rest.

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